

L E S S O N 1 3

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Who Has Believed?

I've now had the privilege of baptizing hundreds of people. Some were as young as eight years old; that eight-year-old, even at that early age, thoroughly expressed how he had discovered his need for a new life in Christ. Some were as old as 90; that 90-year-old had thought he wasn't good enough to go to church and finally, even at that late age, discovered no amount of good works could earn him salvation—but Jesus' sacrificial death on the Cross could.

As 12-year-old twin sisters, Kaitlyn and Karlee do almost everything together. But when Karlee came to me emotionally and tearfully expressing her decision to accept Christ and follow Him in baptism, Kaitlyn waited at the door. When I asked Kaitlyn if they would like to be baptized together, Kaitlyn stoically informed me that Karlee had made that decision, not her. It was a year later—only after she had considered it in her own mind and heart—that Kaitlyn would humbly tell me, "Okay. I'm ready now. I want to follow Jesus."

Rick was 16 when he told me he had been looking into and studying a variety of religious beliefs—and that he would like to talk to me about Jesus and Christianity. We met every other week for several months, and I could see Rick turning more of his mind and heart toward Christ. Only after months of deliberation did he come to the point of declaring, "I now believe in Jesus as my Savior; and so I want to serve Him as my Lord. Will you baptize me?"

1. *What obstacles do people often voice when hesitating to trust Jesus as Lord and Savior?*

2. *Why is the choice to trust Jesus for salvation such a personal decision?*

3. *What factors played an important part in your own decision to follow Jesus?*

LESSON FOCUS: Believe and declare that Jesus is Lord!

Zealous for God

Romans 10:1-4, KJV

1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.

2 For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

Romans 10:1-4, NIV

¹Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. ²For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. ³Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. ⁴Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Paul was clearly a missionary to the Gentiles (through much of Asia Minor and Europe). However, his first stop when visiting a town was always the local synagogue. The apostle always held out hope that one day, many of his Jewish brethren would accept Jesus as their Messiah and fully commit their hearts, souls, and minds to Him.

However, Paul understood the ideological obstacle that was preventing many Jews from embracing Jesus as Lord and Savior. While they were zealous for God, they had expectations of a Messiah who would destroy the Romans and restore Israel to the golden age of Solomon.

Paul did not disparage the law of Moses, but he said there was no way anyone could attain the standard of righteousness demanded by a holy God. Since Christ represented the total fulfillment of the law and its demands for sacrificial atonement, only He could be the source of true righteousness.

4. *What was Paul's hope for the Israelites?*

5. *What was keeping the Jews of Paul's day from believing in Jesus?*

Belief and Justification

Romans 10:5-13, KJV

5 For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.

6 But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:)

7 Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)

8 But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;

9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

11 For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

12 For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Romans 10:5-13, NIV

⁵Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: "The person who does these things will live by them."

⁶But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷"or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

⁸But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: ⁹"If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,'" and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

¹¹As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame." ¹²For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Paul, as an expert in the law, understood the humanly

impossible standard it set, at least in regard to attaining personal holiness. Living by the law, unless done perfectly, would not accomplish righteousness. But what would?

The righteousness that comes by faith doesn't require ascending to the heavens (to make our plea to God, vs. 6) or descending into the grave (to somehow secure the resurrection of Christ). Instead, salvation is as near to a person as his or her mind and mouth.

As verses 9-10 say, by believing in one's heart that Jesus is Lord, agreeing with Him that we are sinful people and unable to atone for our own sins, then we will be saved. In our belief after repentance, we are trusting Jesus to do for us what we cannot accomplish on our own. Paul goes on to say that when the mouth expresses what the heart believes, then that is the evidence that a person has experienced saving faith. The person need never fear being humiliated at the Final Judgement, because Jesus will serve as his or her advocate.

Paul concludes this thought by making a statement that was radical and shocking, especially for a Pharisee—namely, that there was no difference between a Jew and a Gentile, at least when it came to salvation. The blessing of God's grace was available to anyone through a commitment of heart, soul, and mind to Jesus. Salvation is the free gift of God, given without hesitation to those who repent and believe.

6. *What is unique about the type of righteousness that is obtained through faith?*

7. *What does a person have to do to be saved?*

Faith by Hearing

Romans 10:14-17, KJV

14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?

15 And how shall they preach,

Romans 10:14-17, NIV

¹⁴How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵And how can anyone preach unless

except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?

17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

¹⁶But not all the Israelites accepted the good news.

For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?"

¹⁷Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

As a devout Pharisee, Paul experienced a major change to his theological narrative when the resurrected Jesus confronted him on his way to Damascus. But he realized that his fellow Jews would not likely be able to do this without some help. How would they find out what Paul discovered without someone (other believers) telling them the truth?

The other apostles had proclaimed the Gospel in Jerusalem and seen thousands of them turning their lives over to Jesus. Peter and Paul were spreading the Gospel through the Empire. But the newly established, Spirit-filled churches must also proclaim the Gospel of Jesus to anyone within earshot.

Of course, Paul was realistic about the response. He quoted the prophet Isaiah, who said 700 years earlier that not all Jews would believe the reports of God's spokesmen (see Isa. 53:1). Some would casually reject the message, and others would murder the messengers. In any case, those who have been tasked with proclaiming the good news of God to others will do so regardless of the consequences.

Faith comes through hearing—and unless someone is articulating the good news of God, there is simply nothing to hear. The community of believers must clearly convey the Gospel, and the Holy Spirit must soften the person's heart to God's offering of grace for salvation to be found.

8. *What was necessary for the Jews of Paul's day to understand the Gospel?*

9. *What is the usual means by which people understand the path to salvation?*

Righteousness and Faith

Many in Paul's audience believed they could achieve righteousness through their historical position as "God's people" and by following the law of Moses. A key part of Paul's message to the Jews was that Jesus was, in fact, the Messiah predicted by God's prophets. Even today, the relationship between the Old and New Testaments and the fulfillment of prophecy in hundreds of details forms a convincing argument that Jesus was indeed God's Messiah, the Savior for the world.

We may say we are not bound by extensive Old Testament laws, but Jesus summarized the whole law into only two commands: Love God, and love your neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40). If we're honest, it doesn't take long to realize we can't even fully keep these by our ability alone. Therefore, we cannot stand in our own righteousness before a holy God. But God has made this possible through Jesus' sacrificial death in our place. His resurrection proved He triumphed over death and fully paid the penalty for our sins.

All we need to do to claim this righteousness is to simply believe in our hearts that Jesus is fully God and Lord of all. Saving faith trusts that Jesus accomplished what we cannot do on our own. We confirm our belief and heart change toward God when we confess Jesus as the living Lord. Our belief and confession work together to bring us to salvation, and we stand righteous (not guilty) before God.

Once we have received God's mercy and gracious salvation, He calls us to share that good news with others. Many people come to faith through hearing about Jesus, the Word of God, who freely gives eternal life to all who ask.

10. *In what ways do we rely on our perceived righteousness?*

11. *Why can our good deeds not save us from the penalty of sin?*

12. *In what way(s) is God calling you to share the Good News about Jesus with others?*

My Story

Some of us already have a testimony to share of when we heard the Gospel, believed it in our hearts, and then confessed Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Others are still searching for Him or perhaps scoffing at the thought of needing a Savior. Sharing your story with such a person may help that person see how much they need the wonderful, life-changing message of Jesus as Lord and Savior.

► *If you already follow Jesus, briefly write a few sentences about how believing in Jesus and declaring Him your Lord and Savior has changed your life. If you are still skeptical about Jesus and the Christian faith, invite someone from your class to share his or her testimony with you and why it's the greatest message that person has ever heard.*

KEY VERSE

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

—Romans 10:9, KJV

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

—Romans 10:9, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Week of May 27 through June 2

(See *The Quiet Hour* for devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Isaiah 43:8-13—God's Witnesses.

Tues. Psalm 113—Praise the Lord!

Wed. Galatians 3:19-29—God's Children Through Faith.

Thurs. Proverbs 10:19-25—The Lord's Blessing Makes Rich.

Fri. Matthew 6:19-24—Your Treasure Is with Your Heart.

Sat. Matthew 6:25-34—Seek First God's Kingdom.

Sun. Colossians 1:24—2:3—Christ, the Most Precious Gift.